

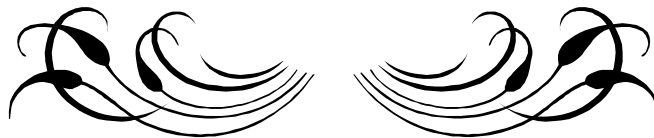
Chapter 5: Public Relations

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is the key element that must be present to establish a healthy public relations (PR) program within a school library media program. In order to effectively communicate with people, the library media specialist needs to develop a specific mindset based on the attributes listed below. Key elements include focus, service, promotion, and evaluation.

Positive Personal Attributes

- **empathy**—This requires that the LMS identifies with students and teachers— their perceptions, thinking, and needs.
- **gregariousness**—The LMS must seek out patrons and have conversations on a one-to-one basis concerning their information needs.
- **subtlety**—The direct approach is not always the best. The message that the LMC program is there for everyone must be delivered indirectly through written, spoken, and visual communication.
- **daring**—The LMS must always be aware of new and different approaches to public relations programming and delivery.
- **organization**—Planning and follow-through become important factors in the delivery of solid PR programs.
- **diversification**—The public served is diversified in relation to their information needs. The LMS must consider these unique and varied needs when developing a PR plan.
- **enthusiasm**—Not only should the LMS be enthusiastic about the PR program, but that enthusiasm should be directed toward the school, student body, and other constituents, as well.
- **instinct**—The LMS must trust in instincts and be aware of what works and what doesn't work concerning their public relations programming.
- **persistence**—The LMS must never give up. A solid public relations program is assembled in a gradual way. There will be issues to be resolved, which become learning experiences. There will also be successes to be celebrated, which become building cornerstones.

KEY ELEMENTS OF PR

■ Focus

The focus of the public relations program is to create an understanding and appreciation of the library media program and the library media specialist as key elements in the team approach to facilitating student learning. The library media specialist should never assume that everyone knows what is being accomplished in the library media program.

Efforts for library media program promotion should start with those areas that are considered strong areas. Some traditionally strong areas include the promotion of reading, literacy, technology as information resources, and facilitation of student learning. The library media specialist should also promote the fun things connected with learning from information such as contests, marathons, and carnivals. The focus remains the same, but the delivery method changes. The intent is still rooted in using and understanding information, in fostering research, and in reading advocacy.

■ Service

Public relations requires conscious identification with the public interest. It requires an ability and willingness to listen, to evaluate, to adapt, and/or to educate others about essential programs and services. An effective library media center public relations program

takes place on all levels beginning in the library media center, continuing throughout the school and district, and extending to the community. To be successful, the PR program should have clearly defined goals and objectives, with ideas and activities designed to reflect the long- and

short-range goals of the library media center program.

Selling the library media center program begins with effective service. This service can be characterized by friendliness and integrity when dealing with constituents, and a program which is purpose-directed. The library media center environment should reflect a spirit of cooperation between the library media center staff and its constituent groups (students,

parents, classroom teachers, school staff, administrators, and community groups). High quality, up-to-date materials in a variety of formats, and of sufficient quantity to meet user needs encourage satisfied patrons to become “boosters” of the library media center.

Publicity is essentially the process of communicating to the public about the library media center. The more people know about the library media center, the more they are likely to support the library media program. There are many ways to publicize the resources and services of the library media center:



Public Relations Techniques

- creating information for in-school announcements;
- designing posters which call attention to LMC publications or services;
- editing a newsletter with information for students, faculty, administration, and parents;
- writing articles for the school newspaper, newsletter, or other publications;
- developing multimedia productions highlighting the use of the center, its services or special programs;
- offering a LMC open house as an individual event or in conjunction with the overall school open house;
- facilitating book fairs and displays concerning special topics, events, and holidays;
- presenting the LMC program to school boards, faculty, and parents;
- designing brochures to promote library media services;
- designing in-service activities for faculty and staff such as workshops concerning specialized topics ;
- creating press releases or information bulletins for local newspaper articles;
- arranging for radio and/or TV coverage of special events, program enhancements, or topics of public interest;
- establishing volunteer programs which involve students, parents and community members;
- participating in statewide and local reading programs such as Mark Twain, Show-Me, KC3, and literature festivals;
- sponsoring contests to encourage the use of LMC resources;
- sponsoring a library media club and/or school-related clubs or activities;
- presenting booktalk and storytelling events;
- arranging for special appearances by local personalities, authors, storytellers;
- collaborating in the design of cooperative programs with the public library and/or local businesses;
- facilitating the establishment and implementation of a Library Advisory Council;
- presenting orientations for teachers concerning LMC services, programs, and resources; and
- providing opportunities for paperback and other resource exchanges, as well as reading encouragement contests.

■ Promotion

Promoting the school library media program is essential to its overall success. The best promotion is the type that takes place naturally—by word-of-mouth. Advocates of the library media program (unofficial and unsolicited) make up the “fan” club. The actions of this group usually consist of talking about the library media specialist’s efforts in designing and conducting programs and the library media specialist’s competency concerning program leadership and management. The best advocate to deliver the message of the good things happening in the library media program depends upon the target audiences. For example, other students are the best advocates when the program is focused on students, and other teachers are the best advocates when the program is focused on teachers. The same formula applies to parents, administrators, and other community target groups.

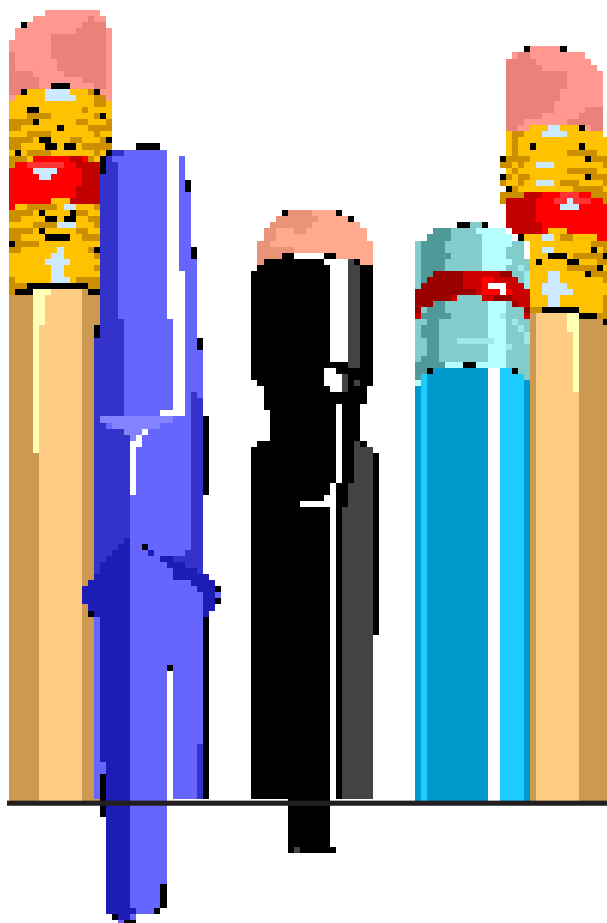
Effective word-of-mouth advocacy must be spread by a diverse group represented by students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community. The library media specialist must establish a connection to as many individuals within this diverse group by actively promoting the library media programs. The library media specialists must tell others consistently, frequently, and with pride and fervor, that the library media program impacts learning in a positive way.

Promotion of the library media program and services may include contests, receptions, workshops, readings, and other types of activities to demonstrate what is being done within the program. These activities should identify the library media program with excitement, with flash and flare, and with the message that within the school this is the place to connect.

The combination of solid programming and visible results will arm a library media specialist to command the attention of strong advocates who will be ready to hear the message and spread it “naturally.”

■ Evaluation

The public relations effort of a library media program is not complete without assessment and evaluation. Assessment often involves understanding constituent needs and addressing those needs through program development. Evaluation involves an attempt to determine if the needs are being met through programming efforts. Evaluation is multifaceted, focusing on individual programs, the overall library media program, and the goals, objectives, and activities of the PR campaign. Assessment and evaluation provides opportunities for creation of new and better programming, as well as the retention of tried-and-true programming. An effective PR campaign for a school library media center program is never completed. The process of assessment and evaluation ensures that the program will remain dynamic and flexible.



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